TIMELY FARM TOPICS - 4b

(Agriculture After the War No. 2)

FARMS FOR VETERANS -- WHERE AND HOW?

Transcription by Marshall Thompson, and Webster Johnson, U. S. Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Agricultural Economics; and Wallace Kadderly, U. S. Department of Agriculture's Radio Service. Recorded, November 6, 1944.
Time: 8 minutes, 44 seconds without annoucer's parts)

- - - - - - -

SUGGESTED INTRODUCTION BY STATION ANNOUNCER (or Farm Director) (LIVE).

Agriculture After the War!

From time to time we're going to bring you discussions on subjects of concern to farm people who are thinking about farm living and the business of farming when this war is over.

The war is still to be won. We cannot and will not slacken in our determination to do all we can -- as farmers and as citizens -- to hasten the day of victory.

Nevertheless we need to think about the days and the years after the war.

Well -- today the subject for discussion is one of special interest to farmers; and to the mothers and fathers of GI Joes who are looking forward to farming when they are discharged from the Army or the Navy.

The subject: Farms for Veterans.

The men who will discuss that subject -- by transcription -- are Marshall Thompson and Webster Johnson. Both are connected with the Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the United States Department of Agriculture. I'm going to turn over to Wallace Kadderly the business of getting from these men the answers to some of the questions service men and women are asking about opportunities for farming.

TRANSCRIPTION:

KADDERLY:

Marshall, I'm going to start with you because I know you've been answering letters from literally hundreds of servicemen on this subject.

If you were called upon -- quick-like -- like this -- how would you classify those letters?

THOMPSON:

That's fairly easy. These men want to know if they can get free land. And they've heard about the opportunities for farming in Alaska. Also, they wonder if they might get some of the farming land that was taken over by the Army and the Navy. And they ask about new farms that might be opened up through large scale irrigation projects in the West. And then of course.....

KADDERLY:

Seems to me you have laid out, right there, a fine basis for our discussion. Let's take that first category -- free land.

That brings up the Homestead laws.

Do many of the boys think it's still possible to get free land -- that is to homestead?

THOMPSON:

You'd be surprised, Wallace!

KADDERLY:

Well, the public lands have been pretty well picked over.....at least public lands suited to farming.

THOMPSON:

Right. So -- the answer we give to questions about free land comes close to being "no". There's very little of this public land left in continental United States that's fit for farming.

KADDERLY:

As I understand it, land to be homesteaded must first be classified as better suited to farming than its present use. That's the case isn't it, Webster?

JOHNSON:

That's the situation. And for that reason many applications for homestead farms must be turned down because the land is simply no good for farming.

KADDERLY:

How many farms are being homesteaded a year -- roughly?

JOHNSON:

Oh -- only a hundred tracts or so a year are taken up under the Homestead Laws.

KADDERLY:

In the whole Nation?

JOHNSON:

In the whole Nation. Any suitable tracts are usually taken up by persons who live in the area and are well acquainted with the lay of the land.

KADDERLY:

Not much chance for free land under the Homestead laws.

Now let's take up that next group of questions asked by servicemen.....the opportunities in Alaska. What about that, Marshall?

THOMPSON:

Well, Wallace, I can tell you a lot of the fellows want to know!

KADDERLY:

What do you tell them?

THOMPSON:

We tell them Alaska is a big place. There are spots that can be homesteaded. Some land can be bought there from present owners. Some farms are still for sale in the Government sponsored Matanuska Colony. But one thing to remember about Alaska is that farming opportunities there are limited by lack of markets and transportation facilities.

JOHNSON:

Another thing. There's a great deal of difference in climate, soil, farming conditions, and markets in the various sections of Alaska.

THOMPSON:

Quite true -- so we always tell the fellows to get full information about conditions in any particular section of Alaska before going there to live.

We tell them, too, that anyone who will want to take up new land in Alaska and develop it from scratch will have to be of the pioneer type -- because that's what it is -- pioneering.

JOHNSON:

It sure is. We must remember that Alaska is a new and -- for the most part -- undeveloped country. Most of the people who go there -- will go as pioneers just as you say, Marshall. They'll not depend on farming alone for a living. They'll do some mining, perhaps. Or, they'll work at lumbering, fishing or fur farming. The people who go to Alaska must be willing to put up with hardships and inconveniences now for the sake of better opportunities later.

KADDERLY:

Well -- I should say that's a very good summing up of Alaska as a place to farm.

And now we come to the third big group of inquiries.....farm land taken over for camps and other military purposes. There has been some talk in the papers lately about this military land. Webster, what are the chances there for farms for veterans?

JOHNSON:

Can't answer that one without giving some background.

These military lands won't be sold until the War and Navy Departments have no further use for them. The present law gives the original owners and tenants first chance at these lands. If the owners or tenants don't buy them back, veterans may have a chance at them.

KADDERLY:

Well what do you tell a soldier or a sailor about that chance? Marshall, I'm asking you that question.

THOMPSON:

We point out that the law specifies public notice shall be given when these lands are put up for sale -- and that these notices must be given wide circulation in local areas where surplus land is to be sold.

KADDERLY:

Very good. And that brings us to questions in group four: New farms that might be opened up.

Webster -- as head of the land economics division in the Department of Agriculture -- you've been studying that question. What do you say about development of new farm land?

JOHNSON:

I guess you have in mind farms that will be developed by the completion of such projects as Grand Coulee and other irrigation and drainage work.

KADDERLY:

That's right, I do.

JOHNSON:

Well -- we have some figures on that.

About 65,000 farms could be developed, in 3 to 5 years after the war, when present irrigation projects under way or authorized are completed. Also, about 40,000 farms could be developed in the Mississippi Delta; and another 20,000 in scattered areas throughout the country by drainage and clearing.

KADDERLY:

Let's see -- This makes a total of 125,000 farms that could be developed in the early years after the war.

JOHNSON:

Provided funds are available to complete projects already authorized.

THOMPSON:

When it comes to the farms that Webster is talking about now, we want to remember that these farms for the most part are not yet ready. A good deal of ditching and other improvement work -- now stopped on account of the war -- will have to be done to get the land in shape for farming.

KADDERLY:

That's a good point, Marshall. But of course everything we have been talkin about so far is in the future.

And this is a good place to bring up the question of where are the farms tha can be bought now or when the servicemen return. Webster -- that's right down your alley.

JOHNSON:

The best way to start in farming is to buy or rent a farm in a community that's already developed...preferably in one's home community. Farmers are retiring every year. Farms come up for sale by farmers moving to the city or changing to other occupations. Farms are sold to settle estates. And some are sold which were originally bought for investment by absentee owners.

KADDERLY:

How many of these farms change hands in a year?

JOHNSON:

About 300,000 last year.

KADDERLY:

Sale of existing farms! That's the biggest source of farms for veterans that you've mentioned.

Marshall, how do servicemen and prospective farmers find out about these farms? You don't keep a list of farms that are for sale, do you?

THOMPSON:

No, we don't These are privately owned farms. We advise servicemen to get in touch with the County Agent in the county in which they want to locate.

JOHNSON:

I'd like to point out that farms for sale in a community are available to whoever pays the most, or is best able to finance the purchase. The GI Act, guaranteeing loans, should put the veteran in a good position to finance the purchase of his farm.

THOMPSON:

Here's another thought. Many of the letters we get show that the men coming back are thinking of "part-time" farming. Some merely want a home in the country with a back-yard garden -- maybe a cow and some chickens. Want to work in town and live in the country.

JOHNSON:

I'm glad you mentioned part-time farms, Marshall. We could have more country home sites.....and with very little disturbance in farm production -- because, you see, these "garden" farmers produce mostly for themselves. Part-time farming may satisfy the desire of those who are interested primarily in living in the country. But anyone living on a part-time farm must be sure to have one foot firmly planted in a city job.

KADDERLY:

That's a good thought. Do you have any last minute advice for the prospecti farmer, Webster?

JOHNSON:

Just this word of caution. Before you go into farming be sure to get the advice of competent people who can tip you off to some of the headaches you'll have, as well as the rewards. Talk to farmers or to the county agent. Above all, be sure that you don't pay too much for your farm. A farm is worth no more than it will earn at normal prices. And it's possible that present favorable prices of farm products may not continue after the war.

KADDERLY:

You fellows have done a good job on the question of where are the farms. We'll try to remember that free farms are scarce and hard to get. That we may have to pioneer -- be more than a farmer -- if we go to Alaska. That many of the proposals we read about in the papers about opening up new farms are plans for the future. That there is land available for part-time farming -- but be sure you've got a good job in the city along with it. And last, but not least, we've learned that most of the farms available now are lands which can be bought -- out in the counties -- from private owners. You'll have to shop around to find them. It's not easy.....it's not like buying a shirt -- but the place to search is among present owners.

ANNOUNCER: (LIVE)

So, if you've picked your county and know where you want to go, see your County Agricultural Agent at the County Seat. If you haven't quite made up your mind, and want general information about where to settle, write the United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. Ask for the two information sheets that are available there. One is called "Where Are The Farms?" -- the other, "H to Get Help in Buying a Farm".

In this discussion of farming opportunities for returning servicemen we have heard Marshall Thompson and Webster Johnson of the United States Department of Agriculture.

Wallace Kadderly was the introductor.

###